

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS
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NP11>SPACE SHUTTLE>BROKAW: As we reported in this program tonight, the two big stories today involve the military budget and military secrets. Well in his commentary tonight, John Chancellor is talking about the military mush, (sic) mission of the space shuttle next month and the measure that are now being taken to keep it secret.

CHANCELLOR: The facts are these: Three news organizations were preparing stories on one part of the next space shuttle mission, which will be a purely military flight: NBC News, the Associated Press and the magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology. The Pentagon learned of this and told the news organizations that making their stories public could seriously endanger national security. All three news organizations agreed. That raises some troublesome questions. American journalism has kept secrets before. President Kennedy once said that he wished The New York Times had published what it knew about the Bay of Pigs before the disaster happened. That might've saved some lives. We kept the secret of the CIA attempt to raise a sunken Russian submarine. We kept the secret of some American hostages in Iran who were hiding in the Canadian Embassy in Tehran. The record is good. But in this case, in the stories about the military, no lives are at stake. We have been asked to take the government's word for it that something called national security could be in danger. And since the government, presumably, knows more about national security than we do, we said yes. The fact is, we don't know enough about highly classified military operations in space to be able to judge this particular mission for ourselves. We've been forced to accept the government's word on faith. It's a dangerous precedent. National security is an imprecise term. Governments can invoke national security to cover up mistakes or to prevent embarrassment. No one at NBC News is saying that's what's going on in this case, but we're all agreed that if we're asked to do this again, we'll have to be doubly cautious. That's commentary for this evening, Tom.

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